

13

Au mois de Marsz, u tant y ad muance,
Puisz ressembler les douls mals qe j'endure.
Ore ai trové, ore ai perdu fiance,
Siq'en amer truis ma fortune dure,
5 Qu'elle est sanz point, sanz reule, et sanz mesure.
N'ad pas egual le pois en sa balance.
Ore ai le coer en ease, ore en destance.

Qant jeo remire a l'oill° sanz variance
La gentilesce et la douce figure,
10 Le sens, l'onour, le port, la contenance
De ma tresnoble dame, en qui nature
Ad toutz biens mis, lors est ma joie pure,
Q'amour, par sa tresdigne pourveance,
M'ad fait amer u tant y ad plesance.

15 Mais qant me vient la droite sovenance
Coment ma douce dame est a dessure
En halt estat, et ma nounsuffisance°
Compense a si tresnoble creature,
Lors en devient° ma joie plus obscure
20 Par droit paour et par desesperance
Qe lune qant eglips la desavance.

Pour vous, q'avetz ma vie en aventure,
Ceste balade ai fait en remembrance.
Si porte ades le jolif mal sanz cure
25 Tanq'il vous plect de m'en faire allegance.

8 MS al loill; Mac al oill, "but we might read a l'oill." (Cf. 12.13, 21.)

17 MS noun suffisance

19 MS endevient

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To the month of March, in which there is so much change,
Can I compare the sweet pains I endure.
Now I have found, now I have lost assurance,^o
°so that in love, I find my fortune hard,
5 for it is without limit, without rule, without restraint.^o
It doesn't have a fair^o weight on its scale.^o
Now I have a heart at ease, now in turmoil.^o

When I regard attentively with my eye
the noble character and the gentle form,
10 the sense, the honor, the bearing, the composure^o
of my very noble lady, °in whom Nature
has placed all that is good, then my joy is pure,
for Love, out of its worthy providence,^o
has made me love where there is so much delight.

15 But when the rightful memory^o comes to me
°how my gentle lady is above
in high estate,^o and (how) my insufficiency
compares to^o so very noble a creature,
then my joy becomes darker
20 out of true fear and lack of hope
than the moon when an eclipse reduces it.^o

For you, who hold my life in the balance,^o
I have made this ballade in remembrance.
Thus do I constantly bear the joyful pain without cure
25 until it pleases you to give me relief.

The heart of this ballade lies in stanzas 2-3, in which the persona weighs his joy at having chosen so perfect a lady against his own insufficiency and, if I understand correctly the reference in line 17 to her "high estate," the obstacles created by the difference in their rank. It is not unusual for the persona to feel unworthy; see Machaut, *Lou.* 4.10, 10.1-3, 11.1-4, 180.10-11, 197.1-4. But a difference in rank is not a common motif in 14th-century poetry. Machaut has only a single ballade in which the male persona feels himself "de tres petit affaire [of very little importance]" compared to his noble lady (*Lou.* 239.1-2), and another in which a woman urges the man she loves to overlook her lack of wealth (*Lou.* 263). Deschamps too has a poem in which the heart blames the body for its folly because it "veult amer en hault estat, / en noble lieu, en treshaulte lignie [wishes to love in a high estate, a noble place, an exalted lineage]" (543.3-4).

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Gower displays an awareness of rank more than once in *50B*; see 2.25, 6, 23.25-27, and 39.26. But only here does the lady's higher position become the source of the persona's discomfort. Nowhere else that I know of, moreover, either in *50B* or elsewhere, is a persona's dilemma set out so neatly in two balanced stanzas, each containing a single nicely wrought sentence. Gower's strategy here overrides the normal requirement of a refrain; it would be a different and much more conventional poem if each stanza ended with the last line of stanza 1.

The rest of the poem, by comparison, is less inventive, and less of a piece: the changeableness of the weather and the unfairness and arbitrariness of the lover's fortune in stanza one, culminating in the "ease" and "dstance" of line 7, prepare the dilemma of stanzas two and three in most general terms, but they seem to be part of a different sort of experience, much more like the typical pains of unrequited love than like the middle of the poem. The envoy abandons the central motif entirely as it turns to address the lady and asks for her "allegance," resuming the "douls mals" of line 2 but without any further consciousness of the difference in their rank and implying a different sort of relationship than that implied in the central stanzas.

In sequence, this is the first of four ballades (with 14, 16, and 17) without a refrain. (The only other is 51.) As Dauphant notes (p. 88), they create a counter-pattern which has the effect of drawing greater attention to the refrain of 15, which in sequence stands out as the exception. "L'absence du refrain pourrait être l'un des moyens d'expression du manque [the absence of the refrain could be one of the means of expressing the lack]" experienced by the persona in each of these poems. 13 is also the first ballade in *50B* that uses only two rhymes (as does 9, the *chanson royale*), and eight of the twelve ballades with only two rhymes occur between 13 and 24. (The others are at 36, 39, 42, and 45.) More importantly, it is the first in a group of ten poems between 13 and 24 that are not addressed directly to the lady in the main body of the poem. (15 and 20, addressed to the lady throughout, are the exceptions.) Elsewhere, apart from the last four ballades, only 5, 35, and 36 are not addressed in the stanzas by a man to a woman or by a woman to a man. In eight of these ten poems, as here and also as in 35, after speaking of the lady in the third person, the persona turns to address her directly in the envoy. It's an unusual move, but not entirely without precedent. In two of his seven *chansons royales* Machaut does the same (*Lou.* 47, 117; Machaut does not include an envoy on his ballades); and among the only two dozen ballades in Deschamps' vast corpus in which the persona addresses the lady in the envoy, there are four in which he speaks of her in the third-person in the stanzas (437, 543, 974, and 1177). In Granson and in the Pennsylvania MS, on the other hand, while one finds a small number of poems that switch from third-person to first in the stanzas themselves (as in the first stanza of 12, above), there are none that refer to the lady exclusively in the third person before turning to address her in the envoy, as Gower does here. The difference from the ballades in which the persona addresses the lady throughout turns out not to be that great in Gower's case since in all but two instances (19 and 21), rather than turning from one imagined audience to another, the envoy refers to the rest of the poem itself as a separate composition (as it does here in line 23), effectively incorporating it into the message that the persona sends. (Machaut does something similar in the envoy to *Lou.* 117, where he asks his lady to listen to "ceste chanson" in which he has otherwise referred to her in the third person.) Gower makes a very different use

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of the envoy in **5**, **17**, **18**, and **36**, in which the persona refers to the lady in the third person throughout. See the note on **17** below.

- 3 *assurance*. On the range of meanings of “fiance,” see the note to **4**¹.12.
- 4-6 Between lines 4 and 6, “fortune” slips from an abstract noun signifying the persona’s general condition into a full personification, unless, that is, Gower originally wrote “la fortune” in line 4 instead of “ma.” The use of the article with the personification is not usual, but cf. **42.1**, *MO* 22927, 26357.
- 5 *without limit, without rule, and without restraint*. Gower uses the same expression in *MO* 948, describing the food served at the wedding of Leccherie and the World, and 9453, with reference to the behavior of a young woman who succumbs to wantonness, and a nearly identical expression in *Tr* **15.18**, “Sanz point, sanz reule, et sanz gouvernement,” referring to the diverse fortunes of love, in all three cases suggesting a lack of restraint or orderliness. Finding a precise equivalent for each word is a bit more difficult. “Reule,” from Latin “regula,” is the usual Anglo-Norman form of the word that appears in continental French more commonly as “regle”; see *AND* s.v. “reule,” *DMF* s.v. “regle.” It can be used in the sense of “precept, principle” (*DMF* loc.cit., B; *AND* loc.cit., 1), but *AND* also provides two 14th-century citations in which it evidently means “government,” as in “under someone’s rule,” a sense that fits well in the line from *Tr*. “Rule” in Modern English covers both senses. “Moderation, restraint” is a common meaning of “mesure” (*AND* s.v. “mesure¹,” 5), a sense that works best in the passages in *MO*. For “sans mesure,” *DMF* s.v. “mesure,” C.1, gives “Qui ne respecte aucune règle [that does not respect any rule],” and cites Machaut’s very similar description of Fortune in Motet 8.6, “Sans foy, sans loy, sans droit et sans mesure [without faith, without law, without rightness, and without *mesure*].” “Point” is the most difficult; neither *DMF* nor *AND* offer any useful help. Of the choices given in Macaulay’s glossary, “limit” is the only one that might apply here; Godefroy s.v. “point” (Macaulay’s likely source) offers “limite, frontière [limit, border]” with two citations. Such a sense might derive from the use of “point” to mark the divisions on a measuring instrument (see *DMF* s.v. “point¹,” II.A.3).
- 6 Fortune is not most commonly depicted with a balance or scale, but unequal weights are a common image of unfairness, as in *CA* Prol. 541, 3 *vv.* 3-4, 5.4670 *vv.* 1-2; and in *CA* 1.42-45, Gower also links the action of Fortune to a scale: “For if there evere was balance / Which of fortune stant governed, / I mai wel lieve as I am lerned / That love hath that balance on honde.” See also Whiting, F504, citing Hoccleve, *Regement* 3.60, “fortunes balaunce,” and N179, citing Lydgate, *Fall of Princes* 2196, “Fortune holdeth the ballaunce.”
fair. *AND* s.v. “egal,” 3: “equitable.” “Egal” more commonly means “equal, identical,” but in the singular we would have to ask equal to what?
- 7 *turmoil*. *AND* s.v. “destance,” 1: “discord, quarrel.” No similar definition is listed in *DMF* or Godefroy, suggesting that this is an Anglo-Norman usage.
- 10 *composure*. “Contenance” might refer either to appearance or behavior generally (*AND* s.v. “contenance,” 2, 3; *DMF* s.v. “contenance,” II.C.1, 3), and so Gower seems to use it in **15.19** and in *MO*, in the phrase “en fait, en dit, en contenance” (12439) or a variant thereof, which he employs no fewer than five times. But it also might have a more specific, more positive sense which seems appropriate here. *AND*, loc.cit., 2 also offers “composure, composed manner”; *DMF*, loc.cit. II.B offers “mesure, dignité, calme [moderation, dignity, calmness].”
- 11-12 Nature is commonly credited with the features that the persona most admires in the beloved, e.g. in Machaut, *Lou*. **195.10**, **205.25-26**, **212.11**; Froissart, *Bal*. **38.11**, *Lay* **1.144**, 156; *et al.* See also the note to **38.15-16** below.

- 14 *providence*. The range of meaning of “pourveance” is quite broad, encompassing “foresight,” “wisdom,” and “provision.” See *DMF* s.v. “pourvoyance.” Gower uses the word in all these senses in *MO* (spelling it “pourvoiance”), but as with “providence” in both Modern English and Modern French, it is difficult, in contexts such as this one, not to hear echoes of “divine pourvoiance,” a phrase that occurs in *MO* 8066 and 27639.
- 15 *rightful memory*. “Droit” here embraces both “true, correct” and “fitting, appropriate to the circumstances.” Gower uses the same phrase with reference to the Virgin’s recollection of her son in *MO* 29359.
- 16-18 Cf. *CA* 5.6597-98: “Betwen hire hih astat and me / Comparison ther mai non be.” Amans makes a more general statement of his unworthiness in 2.459-59.
- 17 *high estate*. “Estat” has as wide a range of application as Modern English “state” or French “état,” but when modified by a word signifying “high” or “low,” it refers most often to social rank or position, as in the lines quoted from Deschamps 543.3-4 above. See *AND* s.v. “estat,” 4; *DMF* s.v. “estat,” III; and *MO* 12500, 23391; *Tr* 13.R; and in English, *CA* 4.1035, 3521. For an exception, where “halt estat” refers instead to the persona’s good fortune in love, see 16.16. With reference to the lady in this poem, “halt estat” appears to refer neither to a temporary condition nor to the gifts of Nature listed in the preceding stanza but to the combination of character and social position implied in the word “tresnoble” in line 18.
- 18 *compares to*. Etymologically “weighs in comparison to,” perhaps picking up on (though in a very different context) the image of the scales in line 6. Cf. *MO* 23100: “Si l’un ove l’autre compensoiez [if you weighed one against the other].”
- 21 *reduces*. One would like to use “dims” or “obscures” here, but Gower is constrained by the need for a rhyme. “Desavancer” means “to set back, harm, lessen, diminish.” See *AND* s.v. “desavancer”; *DMF* s.v. “desavancer.”
- 22 *in the balance*. “En aventure” echoes the arbitrariness of Fortune in the opening stanza rather than specifically the image of the scale (as in my translation). It is an interesting coincidence that our best expression in Modern English for an outcome that is yet to be decided is drawn from the same image that Gower employs in line 6. “En aventure” also echoes 12.4, drawing one small link between this ballade and its predecessor.